CLASSICAL MYTH AS THEMATIC IMAGE IN KING LEAR AND ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

By
Freda Elizabeth Ward

Submitted as an Honors Paper
in the
Department of English

THE WOMAN'S COLLEGE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA

GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

1952

PREFACE

This paper is primarily a study of myth as it appears in King Lear and Antony and Cleopatra. A minor consideration is given to thematic imagery, its appearance in two early plays, and to mythology in general as it appears in Shakespeare's plays. The investigation of Antony and Cleopatra has been conducted partly on the suggestions of others, especially Dr. Marc Friedlaender, but the study of King Lear is my own research. In the two other plays that are briefly considered for their imagery, I have relied on the information collected by others, adding some instances of my own.

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Chapter I

SHAKESPEARIAN IMAGERY

An image is a linguistic device that presents by comparison or analogy with some other object a picture of an impression, emotion, or idea which comes to the poet. The image may be a word or group of words, and it may be a simile, a metaphor, or a word having various levels of interpretation. The image is used to transmit more vividly to the reader the idea of the poet. Because emotions and associations are aroused within the mind of the reader by the image, there is greater sensitivity to the idea of the poet.

Probably more studies have been made of Shakespearian imagery than have been made of any other phase of his work.[1] Up until the second decade of the twentieth century, the study of imagery in Shakespeare's plays was a study of the individual images, groups of images, or the characteristic method of presenting the images which the dramatist used. A new era of critical imagistic study began in 1917, becoming very popular in the late 1920's when Stephen Brown, H. W. Wells, Middleton Murry, George Rylands, Elizabeth Holmes, and G. Wilson Knight started writing their new criticisms. However, their studies dealt with the impact of imagery upon their own emotions rather than with scientific sifting of evidence. Theirs was an

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1. W. R. Keast, "Imagery and Meaning in King Lear", Modern Philology, XLVII (1949), 45.

entirely subjective approach.[2]

With the publication of two articles in 1930 and 1931 and the publication in 1935 of her book, Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us, Caroline Spurgeon launched a new and objective approach to the study of Shakespeare's imagery. She gathered and classified the subjects of images most frequently used by Shakespeare in order to determine the personality of the dramatist, to prove the authenticity of his disputed works by showing that the same images appear in them as in those of his known authorship, and to show that certain types of images were recurrent in each play, setting a motif or atmosphere for the play. While Spurgeon must be credited with beginning this objective approach to the study of imagery, her conclusions, especially in regard to Shakespeare's personality, habits, likes and dislikes, seem to be greatly oversimplified.

The next important scholar in the field of imagistic study was a German professor, Wolfgang Clemen, whose Shakespeare's Bilder appeared in 1937. Spurgeon used a highly statistical method, collecting the number of images of a certain subject within a play and making charts and graphs of the frequency of types of images; Clemen studied the development of Shakespeare's imagery in relation to the development of his ability in subject and plot. His study aimed at the investigation of the relation and connection of an image as it appeared as a part of the entire organism of the play:

> The image is rooted to the totality of the play. It has grown in the air of the play; how does it share its atmosphere or contribute to its tenor? To what degree is the total effect of the play enhanced and colored by images?[3]

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2. Una Ellis-Fermor, "Some Recent Research in Shakespeare's Imagery," Shakespeare Association, London: Oxford University Press, 1937, pp. 18-23.

3. Wolfgang Clemen, The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951, p. 4.

His study is also of the evolution of imagery as found in Shakespeare's plays:

> Only little by little did Shakespeare discover the possibilities which imagery offers to the dramatist. In his hands metaphors gradually developed into more and more effective instruments: at first fulfilling only a few and simple functions, they later often serve several aims at one and the same time and play an effective part in the characterization of the figures of the play and in expressing the dramatic theme.[4]

A third approach to the problem is pursued by G. Wilson Knight in his three books, Wheel of Fire, The Imperial Theme, and Crown of Life. His is a study of recurrent or iterative imagery in a play, imagery in which

> the individual images, are not mechanically linked together in the mood of fancy but organically related, modified by a predominant passion and mutually modifying each other.[5]

Knight sees this recurrent or iterative imagery as serving two purposes: it gives a clue to the symbolic meaning of the play and it helps in establishing the emotional impact which the play has on the audience. Other scholars who have followed this same pattern but who have made lesser contributions are William Empson, George Garrett, and M. C. Bradbrook.

Since 1937 Shakespearian scholarship has pursued to a great degree the study of recurrent imagery. Donald Stauffer in his Shakespeare's World of Images, 1949, has traced Shakespeare's philosophic credo as it grew and changed through his writing career by showing how the images change in content and subject as the dramatist's attitude toward life and immortality changed. The imagery in this way becomes an integral part of the plays,

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4. Ibid., p. 5.

5. Cleanth Brooks, Well-Wrought Urn, New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1947. Cleanth Brooks' only contribution to Shakespearian research in imagery is an analysis of Macbeth. He has, however, become an important figure in the study of iterative imagery.

illustrating and becoming one with the theme of the play and the attitude of the hero.

Various scholars have dealt with more specific aspects of the imagery. Robert Heilman in The Great Stage, 1948, has dealt with the imagistic patterns in King Lear; Audrey Yoder in 1947 published her Animal Analogy in Shakespeare's Character Portrayal, a study of Shakespeare's animal images; and Harry Levin has made a study of the Player's Speech in Hamlet.

The latest trend is a study of the psychological processes of Shakespeare's mind as revealed through his imagery. Edward Armstrong, author of Shakespeare's Imagination, has made an invaluable investigation of Shakespeare's habit of thinking as portrayed in the imagery of his plays. He holds that the dramatist thought in terms of "cluster images", that is, one thought automatically and unconsciously called forth another image which is always associated with the first in the poet's mind. The images may appear in elaborated form or as a group in a character or plot. Once a thought process is begun in a play, all images are automatically called forth and fall in the context of one general theme. It is this relation of all images to one specific theme that is called thematic imagery.

> A thought excites the frequent appearance throughout a play of images all connected with a body of memories already organized into association with one another under a specific interest.[6]

Four principles govern Shakespeare's thematic thinking:

1. An apparently insignificant cue may initiate the recall of a very extensive series of images;

2. Once a theme or interest assumes importance it tends to recur and become integrated into the texture of the play;

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6. Edward Armstrong, Shakespeare's Imagination, London: Lindsay Drummond, 1946, p. 111.

3. The association of the images is not achieved mainly on the conscious level;

4. Images revive one another in a continuous and fluent way.[7]

In some of Shakespeare's plays thematic imagery takes on special and wonderful characteristics. Not only is the imagery related to one theme, but the theme is parallel to the plot of the play. He drew from the bountiful storehouse of his mind a story parallel in plot to the plot of the play, and from this he took his images, thus creating an imagistic plot comparable to the story of the play. This metaphorical plot and the play's plot are connected by images, ambiguities, puns, and words of multiple reference. This special kind of thematic imagery appears in two of his pre-tragic plays, Richard II and As You Like It. Here the images are based on two religious stories.

The imagery in Richard II identifies Richard's fall and death with Christ's betrayal and crucifixion. By making Richard a sacrificial deity, the plots and crimes committed against him become all the more heinous. Once these specific images connecting Richard and Christ are made, other more general Biblical images are called forth, adding to the supernatural tone of the entire play. Not only do the religious images present Richard as a god slain on an altar, but also the frequent and forceful use of sun images heightens the agony and intensity of his death.[8]

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7. Ibid., p. 115.

8. Dover Wilson suggested the significance of the Christ image and collected most of the sun images. The gathering of the religious images has been done partly by Dr. Marc Friedlaender and partly by me.
Dover Wilson: II.iv.21-2; III.ii.36-53; III.iii.62-7; III.iii.178-9; IV.i.260-2; IV.i.283-4.
Richard Altick, "Symphonic Imagery in Richard II," PMLA, LXII (1947), 339-365, makes no mention of the Christ images. The nearest he comes to seeing the religious references is a suggestion of the Tree of Jesse relationship.

These analogies, although most of them are made by Richard himself, definitely establish Richard as the hero of the play.

He calls those who plot his downfall, "Three Judases, each one thrice worse than Judas." (III.ii.132)[9] His betrayers are more numerous than were Christ's:

> So Judas did to Christ; but he, in twelve,
> Found truth in all save one; I, in twelve thousand none. (IV.i.171)

Some of his friends have, like Pilate, washed their hands:

> Showing an outward pity, yet you Pilates
> Have here delivered me to my sour cross,
> And water cannot wash away your sin. (IV.1.242)

Finally, England because of this terrible act of regicide becomes "the field of Golgotha." (IV.1.144)

Other passages not containing specific references to the Christ story take on additional meaning in view of these first images. Reminiscent of Judas,

> Mowbray hath received eight thousand nobles
> The which he hath detained for lewd employments,
> Like a false traitor and imperious villain. (I.i.92)

As Judas regrets the murder of Christ, so Bolingbroke wishes Richard alive.

> Though I did wish him dead,
> I hate the murtherer, love him murthered. (V.vi.40)

The whole of Act Five, Scene Four seems symbolic of Peter's denial of Christ. Suggesting Christ's ascent to Calvary, Richard's departure into exile is described:

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9. All citations to Shakespeare's plays are to the act and scene divisions and the line numbering used in The Complete Works of Shakespeare, edited by George Lyman Kittredge, Boston: Ginn and Company, 1936.

> But dust was thrown upon his sacred head;
> With which such gentle sorrow he shook off,
> His face still combating with tears and smiles
> (The badges of his grief and patience),
> That, had God for some strong purpose steel'd
> The hearts of men, they must perforce have melted
> And barbarism itself have pitied him. (V.ii.36)

He gives away his throne in a tone and manner greatly like Christ's message from the cross. (IV.i.204-215)

More general religious images occur throughout the play. The blood of the dead Duke of Gloucester cries "like sacrificing Abel's" (I.i.106), and Richard's murderer is banished from England:

> With Cain go wander through the shades of night,
> And never show thy head by day or night. (V.vi.44)

The gardener is "old Adam's likeness," (III.iv.73) whose news of Richard's downfall is denied:

> What Eve, what serpent, hath suggested thee
> To make a second fall of cursed man? (III.iv.76)

And the parting of Richard and his queen is reminiscent of Ruth's beautiful words to Naomi:

> And must we be divided? Must we part?
> Then thither he goes, let me go. (V.i.85)

The sun, symbol of royalty for Shakespeare and the personal emblem of Richard II, falls in line with the crucifixion images, adding to the supernatural qualities of Richard. Richard's decline of power is like the disappearing sun:

> Thy sun sets weeping in the lowly West,
> Witnessing storms to come, woe, and unrest. (II.iv.22)

His penetrating wisdom is comparable to the searching rays of the sun:

> know'st thou not
> That when the searching eye of heaven is hid
> Behind that globe, that lights the lower world,
> Then thieves and robbers range abroad unseen

In murthers and in outrage boldly here;
But when from under this terrestrial ball
He fires the proud top of the Eastern pines
And darts his light through every guilty hole,
When murthers, treasons, and detested sins,
The cloak of night being pluck'd off their backs,
Stand bare and naked, trembling at ourselves:
So when this thief, this traitor Bolingbroke,
Who all this while hath revell'd in the night
Whilst we were wandering with the Antipodes,
Shall see us rising in our throne, the East;
His treasons shall set blushing in his face
Not able to endure the sight of day. (III.ii.54)

In despair Richard bids his followers go "from Richard's night to Bolingbroke's fair day." (III.ii.218) In sorrow Richard laments,

Down, down I come, like glist'ring Phaethon,
Wanting the manage of unruly jades. (III.iii.179)

Bolingbroke compares Richard to the sun.

Richard himself doth appear,
As doth the blushing discontented sun
From out the fiery portal of the East
When he perceives the envious clouds are bent
To dim his glory and to stain the track
Of his bright passage to the Occident. (III.iii.67)

Looking into a mirror, Richard asks,

Was this the face
That like the sun did make beholders wink? (IV.i.284)

The analogy of the king with the sun is shifted by Richard as Bolingbroke becomes king:

If that I were a mockery king of snow,
Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke
To melt myself away in water drops! (IV.i.262)

When Bolingbroke is banished from England, he bids Richard good-bye:

The sun that warms you there shall shine on me,
And those his golden beams here lent
Shall point on me and gild my banishment. (I.iii.148)

In another of Shakespeare's plays the thematic imagery is based on a religious story. Interestingly, the play is a comedy, As You Like It. Turning from the theme of the sacrificial deity in Richard II,

the English dramatist took the doctrine of the Fall of Man as background and used as its archetype the Parable of the Prodigal Son for the thematic imagery in this play of Arcadian life.[10] The Fall of Man brings to mind immediately the Garden of Eden, haven of complete idyllic life. Undoubtedly, the Arcadian life in the Forest of Arden called forth an association with the Garden of Eden. The Parable of the Prodigal Son as the archetype of Man's fall from grace is the basis for the Oliver-Orlando theme, the other images occurring throughout the entire play. Orlando, shamefully treated, early asks his brother,

> for call you that "keeping" for a
> gentlemen of birth that differs not
> from the stalling of an ox? (I.i.10)

Bitterly Orlando rails at his brother who "lets me feed with his hinds, bars me the place of a brother." (I.i.18) A few lines later, Orlando asks Oliver,

> Shall I keep your hogs and eat husks
> with them? What prodigal portion
> have I spent, that I should come
> to such penury? (I.i.36)

He demands,

> give me the poor allottery my
> father left me by testament - with
> that I will go by my fortunes. (I.i.69)

Oliver retorts, "And what wilt thou do, beg when that is spent?" (I.i.72)

Reverting to the doctrine of the Fall of Man: there are many direct Biblical references and many images that take on importance when viewed in context with more specific allusions. In Arden the exiled groups feel "the penalty of Adam" (II.i.5) in the changing seasons; and this is

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10. Most of these instances were gathered by Edward Armstrong. I have added a few general religious references: I.i.18; I.i.72.

a "world almost six thousand years old." (IV.i.91) Jacques will rail "against the first-born of Egypt." (II.v.59) The "palm-tree" and "the green and gilded snake" belong to the Garden of Eden. Gloomily Jacques observes the happy wedded couples:

> There is, sure, another flood toward,
> And these couples are coming to the ark. (V.iv.37)

General images assuming more importance in the creation context are found in Orlando's epistle to Rosalind: "The brief unpeopled desert," "how brief the life of man," and "violated vows." Reminiscences of creation are in "So you may put a man in your belly" (III.ii.203), "Is he of God's making?" (III.ii.204), and in the comment on time and seven years. The stress on ribs, rib-breaking, and ladies in Act One, Scene Two suggests the origin of woman from man's rib. Similarly, Touchstone asks:

> Wilt thou rest damn'd? God help
> thee shallow man! God make
> incision in thee! thou art raw! (III.ii.74)

The idea of Adam appears in "no breather in the world but myself." (III.ii.276) Rosalind finds Orlando's verses on a tree, suggesting the tree of good and evil:

> I found them on a tree.
> Truly, the tree yields bad fruit. (III.ii.115)

Biblical coloring is given to images which at first glance seem innocent of it when the statement, "I found him under the trees like a dropped acorn" (III.ii.232) is followed two lines later by, "It may well be called Jove's tree when it drops forth such fruit." (III.ii.234) "Feet were lame and would not bear themselves," (III.ii.169) and "stretched along like a wounded knight" are reminiscences of the serpent. Faith as referred to by Christ is in "mountains may be removed with earthquakes." (III.ii.185)

Aside from these images, ecclesiastical terms prevail throughout the play: "devil," "catechism," "christened," "priest that lacks Latin," "monastic," "chapel," "sermons," "bells have knoll'd to church," "deifying," "Judas," "chaste," "pilgrimage," "touch of holy bread," "nun," "religious," "Christian," "Godhead," "prayers," "fasting," "olive tree," "purgation," "heavenly synod," "scrip and scrippage," "bear no cross," and "testament."

As Shakespeare matured as a writer these cases of thematic imagery based on a specific story seem to become more frequent. In Richard II and As You Like It he drew from religious sources. But as he turned to his tragedies he turned to another source for his thematic imagery, to Roman and Greek mythology. Using the classic myths in the same manner as the religious tales, he skillfully and magnificently wove mythology into his tragedies.

Chapter II

SHAKESPEARE AND MYTHOLOGY

Shakespeare's debt to mythology is a tremendous one. Invaluable studies have been made that show which myths Shakespeare most frequently used and that reveal the sources of those myths. One of the earliest of these investigations was made in 1880 by Paul Stapfer, a French scholar. He traced throughout the plays, especially in the earlier ones, the contributions made by the saga of the Trojan War. A second study was made in the early part of the twentieth century by Robert K. Root. Systematically collecting and examining the many classical allusions in the authentic works of Shakespeare, he sought to determine the sources of the myths, the conception Shakespeare had of myth, and the importance of myth as an element of his works. A more recent collection of classical allusions in Shakespearian drama has been made by Francis G. Stokes. He has not confined himself to the collection of classic references alone but has compiled a dictionary of all characters and proper names appearing in Shakespeare's plays and poems. For each reference he has given the probable source.

Although mythology was important for Shakespeare, his indebtedness to it differs from play to play. The number of explicit mythological allusions within a play runs the gantlet from two in Measure for Measure to thirty-seven in A Midsummer Night's Dream. A fairly regular pattern can be traced as to the quantity of the mythical allusions in the plays

of his different periods. In his earlier plays, with the exceptions of King John and Richard II, references to mythological figures abound with a climax reached in 1594 or 1595 in The Merchant of Venice and A Midsummer Night's Dream. A general decline in the number of allusions then begins with fewer references occurring in Parts One and Two of Henry IV, Henry V, As You Like It and other plays of this period. Hamlet shows a temporary upsurge in the quantity of classical allusions. However, beginning with Julius Caesar and extending through Measure for Measure, Othello, Lear, Macbeth, and Timon of Athens the number of mythological similes and metaphors is surprisingly small. With Antony and Cleopatra a new upsurge appears with fairly frequent allusions in the later romances. Although the quantity of mythological allusions increased and diminished, they were always present in some number, showing his tremendous fondness for the myths.

Mythological sources for the classic material used by Shakespeare are known to be Ovid and Virgil.[1] Arthur Golding's translation of Ovid's Metamorphoses seems to have been his chief companion, the imagery of Golding's translation often moving into Shakespeare's plays.[2] Minor sources for his mythological allusions are Chapman's Homer, the Fasti, and Ars Amatoria by Ovid.[3] Until the present time these three, Ovid, Virgil, and Homer, have been regarded as the mythographers who furnished Shakespeare with classic mythology.

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1. Douglas Bush, Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1932, pp. 9, 10.

2. Edgar Fripp, Shakespeare Studies, London: Humphrey Milford, 1930, p. 6.

3. Robert K. Root, Classical Mythology in Shakespeare, New York: Henry Holt, 1903, pp. 3-5.

It is indeed very strange that the two most important sources of mythology during the sixteenth century have been omitted in all surveys of Shakespeare's sources. The master mythographers for the century, the Renaissance classicists, Giovanni Boccaccio and Natalis Comes, have been completely overlooked.[4] A third very important source for myth during the Renaissance, Hyginus, writer in the Augustan age, has also been disregarded.

Italian mythographers were extremely popular in Renaissance and Elizabethan poetry. They were the most influential of classical sources in the sixteenth century.[5] An inspection of Ovid and Shakespeare's plays shows that Ovid was not a sufficient source for all the mythological details in the plays, and it is only logical to assume that he used the most popular sources of his day, among them the Genealogia Deorum by Boccaccio,[6]

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4. Edmund Spenser drew enough material of dramatic detail from Boccaccio and Comes to permit us to class them among the poet's major sources for the Fairie Queen.
Henry G. Lotspeich, Classical Mythology in the Poetry of the Edmund Spenser, Princeton: University Press, 1932, pp. 14, 15.
If Spenser drew so heavily from Boccaccio and Comes, we may assume that they were also at Shakespeare's disposal.

5. Frank L. Schoell, "Les mythologistes italiens de la Renaissance et la poésie élizabethaine," Revue de Littérature Comparée, IV (1924), 7:
Nous ne retiendrons que les trois principaux: le de Genealogia Decorum de Boccace (imprime pour la premiere fois en 1472), le De Deis Gentium varia et multiplex Historia de Lileo Gregorio Giraldi (Bale, 1548) et Mythologiae sive Explicationum Fabularum Libre de Natali Conti; mieux connu sous son nom latin de Natalis Comes...et sous son nom francais de Noel Le Conte (Venise, 1551).

6. Cornelia C. Coulter, "The Genealogy of the Gods," Vassar Medieval Studies, New Haven: Yale Press, 1923, p. 340. Eight Latin editions were published between 1472 and 1532; two French translations appeared in 1498 and 1531; and nine Italian editions were issued from 1547 to 1606.

the Mythologiae by Comes,[7] and Fabulae by Hyginus.[8] From Boccaccio, Comes and Hyginus, either directly or as their versions of myths circulated through Renaissance England, it is probable that Shakespeare augmented his knowledge of mythology, incorporating their versions with those of Ovid and Virgil to suit his purposes.

Shakespeare's attitude toward myth underwent a vast change as he matured into a master dramatist. In his early plays Shakespeare used the myths as beautiful and learned decorations. The young man from Stratford was laboring under a handicap caused by his lack of university training. Sneered at by the University Wits he lavished the classical adornments to display his exceptional knowledge. They are used charmingly and exquisitely, but they lack profundity. In A Midsummer Night's Dream we find a wonderful conglomeration of classic allusions, beautiful but lacking significance. The sun rises "on Neptune with fair blessed beams," the moon is "Aurora's harbinger," a star is "Venus in her glimmering sphere," the night is "as black as Acheron," Hippolyta hunted with "Hercules and Cadmus once," Hermia swears "by Cupid's strongest bow," and the moon is "Phoebe." In the same manner mythology in The Merchant of Venice is the frothy, decorative stuff. Charmingly, but certainly having no profound value, Lorenzo and Jessica battle by means of mythological figures. "In such a night" did Troilus

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7. Natalis Comes was the most popular author of mythography during the Renaissance. He was recognized as master for almost a century in France, being regarded as one of the most learned men of his time. He reached England especially in vulgar French editions, greatly influencing Chapman. Schoell, op. cit., pp. 12-14.

8. On the basis of the British Museum, the Bibliotheque Nationale, and the Library of Congress holdings we can be sure of these editions as a minimum:
Comes, Mythologiae - 10 Latin editions by 1605 (first edition apparently in 1568)
3 editions in French (1604-1611)
Hyginus, Fabulae - 7 Latin editions (1535-1608)

dream of Cressida, "Thisbe fearfully o'ertripped the dew," "stood Dido... on wild sea banks," and "Medea gathered enchanted herbs." "Many Jasons" come in quest of Portia, and "time flies faster than Venus' pigeons fly."

In some of these early plays, however, another use of myth begins to develop. Not only do the myths furnish decoration, but they also become sources for plots. The Pyramus-Thisbe love story is one of the analogs for the plot of Romeo and Juliet, and a variation of it receives a far different treatment in A Midsummer Night's Dream. These uses represent a development beyond the simple use of myth for ornamental purposes. Myth came to have a plot parallel with the plots of Shakespeare's play. But at this stage there is no secretly and skillfully woven mythic plot in the imagery.

Gradually through experience and through a deepening realization of the spiritual significance of mythology, Shakespeare turned to the imagistic mythic plots in his tragedies. After this period of myth in the tragedies, he came again to no hidden mythic plots. No longer is the mythology involved in the imagery, for the myths occur within the events themselves as the plays throb with life and reaffirmations of immortality. In all four of the later plays, Cymbeline, Pericles, The Winter's Tale, and The Tempest, elements of magic and the supernatural have an important function: Diana appears in Pericles, Jupiter in Cymbeline, Iris, Ceres, and Venus in The Tempest, and Apollo directly influences the action of The Winter's Tale. The rebirth myth is established in the events of Pericles, The Winter's Tale, and Cymbeline. In this stage, classic allusions occur but they become an important part in myths created by Shakespeare himself, myths of love and immortality which dispel doubt, disbelief, and tragedy.

Before Shakespeare could accomplish this last direct use of mythology, it was necessary that he see in certain myths parallels to those events that take place within his plays. In Hamlet we see this probing on the part of the dramatist to find instances by which Hamlet can compare himself to certain mythic figures.

It has been suggested that Hamlet sees in certain myths the reflection of his own problem,[9] but there seems to be no proof that Hamlet recognizes in any myth the parallel for himself or for his dilemma. Strangely enough -- or perhaps not so strangely since Hamlet is never able to find a parallel for himself -- many of the classical allusions present a dissimilarity between the characters of the play and mythic figures; that is, his mother is unlike Hecuba when Gertrude refuses to mourn for her husband, old Hamlet is no more like Claudius than is "Hyperion to a satyr," (I.ii.240) Claudius is no more like old Hamlet than young Hamlet is like "to Hercules," (I.ii.153) Laertes would have the dust piled on Ophelia's grave to "o'ertop old Pelion," (V.i.276) and Hamlet cries for her grave to "make Ossa appear a wart." (V.i.306) Neptune, Phoebus, and Hymen appear in the old decorative function in the play-within-the-play; Ilion, Pyrrhus, Hecuba, Aeneas, and Dido are in the Player's Speech; and the remaining seven allusions bear no significance to the plot of the play. The gap remains between Hamlet's world and the world of mythology.

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9. Harry Levin, "An Explication of the Player's Speech," Kenyon Review, XII (1950), 273-296, sees in Hamlet the myth of Troy, Priam and Hecuba. He contends that all the parallelisms are collected in the Player's speech, (II.i).

After writing Hamlet, Shakespeare created his later tragedies. At last he saw a profundity in the myths, and he saw a similarity between various myths and the plots of his plays. In King Lear, Antony and Cleopatra, and probably in other plays such as Timon of Athens that are not here subjected to a detailed study, Shakespeare had in his memory a myth on which he based the imagery for a play, reproducing the myth in the imagery. The parallelism of the imagistic plot and the plot of the play is shown by similes, metaphors and words having multiple reference.

Chapter III

KING LEAR

King Lear has been called a "tragic vision of humanity" with the characters becoming "vague symbols of universal forces."[1] The vast sweeping scope of the play with the profundity of tragic events places on Lear the imagined burdens of the world. Lear is not of a time nor a space but is of any time or any space. The play is a study of evil and good, of pride and humility. The terrifying grandeur of the play with its absolute rhapsodic beauty and its pure common-sense quality has caused it to be called the greatest of Shakespeare's tragedies.

As the tragedies grew in scope and spiritual significance, Shakespeare's use of mythology came to attain more symbolic value. He came to see in certain myths parallels to his own plots, and through his genius he wove those myths into the imagery of the plays until the myths and tragedies came to be one. In King Lear he based his imagery on a myth of ingratitude and punishment. The awareness of that myth serves to illuminate certain things in the play that are obscure.

Upon first inspection the contributions of mythology to King Lear seem very small. Only nine explicit allusions to mythological figures are made during the entire play.

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1. G. Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire, London: Oxford University Press, 1930, p. 195.

Then suddenly the mythical names begin to fall into a pattern, a pattern that becomes astounding when the central figure of that myth is identified as the underlying symbol of human sacrifice, Ixion. The cue is given by the direct references to Jupiter, Juno, and the Centaurs and by Lear's agonized allusion to a "wheel of fire."[2] Every classical allusion, with the exception of the ones to Ajax and Phoebus, which are made by Kent, has a direct bearing or relation to the story, a story of eternal punishment for a tragic flaw of pride.

Ixion, king of the Lapithae, was condemned to wander over the earth undergoing extreme agony for the murder of his father-in-law. The gods looking down on the earth saw Ixion, and Jupiter, chief of the gods, pitied the man in his suffering. Forgiving him, Jupiter carried Ixion to Olympus to dwell among the gods. There he might have lived happily through eternity, but Ixion's evil nature manifested itself again. He was seized with consuming desire for Juno, chief of the goddesses. Jupiter learned of Ixion's plans to seduce Juno and secretly fashioned a cloud in the likeness of the goddess. He then permitted the physical union of Ixion and the disguised cloud.

From that union the Centaurs were born, evil creatures half-human and half-horse. These terrible animals were famous all through mythology for their extreme lust and savage nature; their most famous battle occurred

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2. Although Wilson Knight in his book Wheel of Fire devotes two long chapters to King Lear and takes the title of his book from the allusion, he fails to see the Ixion myth. He also explicitly states that Lear's swearing by the classical gods has no significance.

when one of them attempted to commit an outrage on the bride of their brother, Pirithous. There was one exception among these evil children of the cloud and Ixion. The good and gently Chiron was as kind and noble as the other brothers were evil. Chiron is especially noted as the teacher and guardian of Aesculapius, the physician.

Jove, maddened with rage that Ixion should dare aspire to offend a god, hurled him from Olympus to Hades. There Ixion was bound naked to a revolving wheel entwined with serpents. He was fastened to this wheel forever and allowed no relief from his torture. Beside him were Tantalus, Tityus, and Sisyphus, all being punished for attempted injuries to the gods.

Once the terrible tortures did stop for a short time. Orpheus, symbol of love, descended into Hades to win back his wife, Eurydice. To appease the gods of the underworld Orpheus played his lyre, and his sweet music soothed all the anguish of Hades. Then did the wheel of Ixion pause along with all the other agonies of the underworld. But as Orpheus failed to save his bride, the punishments began anew.[3]

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3. Ovid gives most of the story of Ixion in the Metamorphoses: father of the Centaurs by the cloud (XII, 504ff.), punishment on the wheel (V,461,462), momentary stopping of the wheel (X,43), and father of Pirithous (VIII,403).

All references to the Metamorphoses in this paper are to the Loeb Library translation (Frank J. Miller, tr., London: Heinemann, 1926). However I have compared it in a general way with the Golding translation used by Shakespeare and have found no significant differences in the passages cited. (Arthur Golding, tr., The XV Books of P. Ovidius Naso, entytuled Metamorphosis, ed. W. H. D. Rouse, London, 1904).

Comes, Mythologiae, Venice, 1568, adds the serpents to the wheel: "rotaeque perpetus notre circumvolutae inter serpentes alligatus." (Bk. VI, chap. xvi, p. 614) He also makes Chiron the son of Ixion: "memoriae prodidit Strabo libro 9. Phlegyam non patrem sed fratrem fuisse Ixionis, cuius filius fuit Pirithous, & Chiron ut alii." (Bk. VI, chap. xvi, p. 614)

Boccaccio, Della Genealogie, Venice, 1606, also adds serpents: "griato de una volubile ruota piena de serpenti." (IX, p. 514)

A. B. Cook, Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion, Vol. I, London: Cambridge University Press, 1914, pp. 199-211, has found that in all mythological art existing since Hellenic times Ixion is pictured nude on a flaming wheel that is entwined with serpents.

It seems to have been Shakespeare's intention that the awareness of the Lear-Ixion identity be restricted to Lear alone. Every direct allusion giving the clue to the Ixion myth is made by Lear. The first important mythical allusions are to the Roman gods. He commands them as though they were his servants ready to do his bidding. Heilman in a detailed study of Lear comments on the constant awareness of the gods as an element in Lear's pride:

> From the start Lear is constantly aware of the gods; in oaths and curses he tempestuously calls upon them as if they were spirits doing his bidding, so that his religious feeling serves, actually, as a perverse expression of the pride which is an ingredient in his tragic flaw...to him the supernatural is a reality of every moment.[4]

Strangely, Heilman does not recognize the Ixion myth nor does he distinguish between Lear's use of the classical deities and the gods referred to by all the other characters. Lear is aware of Ixion's gods. When he banishes Cordelia, it is with the oath, "By Jupiter." (I.i.181) Seeing Kent in the stocks, he swears, "By Jupiter" (II.iv.21), and Kent mockingly retorts, "By Juno." (II.iv.22) Lear, in rage at Goneril, disowns her, but god-like he will

> not bid the Thunder-bearer shoot
> Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove. (II.iv.230)

In context with these classical gods, it is logical that he swears by other of the Roman deities. He talks of the "mysteries of Hecate and the night." (I.i.153) He angrily turns on Kent with "Now by Apollo," (I.i.182) and Kent again echoes, "By Apollo, thou swearest thy gods in vain." (I.i.163)

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4. Robert Heilman, The Great Stage, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1948, p. 266.

But it is Lear alone who swears by these gods. The other characters, with the two exceptions made by Kent, never refer to them. Gloucester swears "by the kind gods" (III.vii.35), then by "O ye gods!"(III.vii.70), and again by "the kind gods." (III.vii.91) Edgar calls "O gods!" (IV.i.24) Cruelly punished for past sins, Gloucester hopelessly sees the frailty of man:

> As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods.
> They kill us for their sport. (IV.i.37)

He prays that "Fairies and gods will prosper thee!" (IV.vi.30) Again he addresses the "ever-gentle gods" (IV.vi.221), and Edgar knows that "the gods" are just. (V.iii.256) Albany asks "the gods" to defend Cordelia. (V.iii.170) Regan calls on "the blest gods." (II.iv.171)

At the climax of Lear's punishment on the heath, he recognizes his daughters as the Centaurs:

> Down from the waist they are Centaurs,
> Though women all above,
> But to the belts do the gods inherit,
> Beneath is all the fiend's. (IV.v.129)

Lear's identification of his daughters with the Centaurs has a far more meaningful connotation than he realizes. In a play built on ironies, this is but one instance of many, but it is a pregnant one. Lear subconsciously chooses the word because he associates himself with Ixion, father of the Centaurs. However his only meaning of the word is as a description of his daughters' extreme cruelty. Ironically the label is wonderfully appropriate in their future behavior. Lear is unaware of the sisters' wild passion for Edmund and their tremendous jealousy of each other. No one guesses the full extent of their passion or its ultimate end. It actually results in their deaths, Goneril poisoning Regan and killing herself. As sister turned against

sister in King Lear, the Centaurs in mythology turned against their brother for the same reason. Pirithous, son of Ixion, invited the Centaurs to his wedding feast where one of the half-human creatures attempted to satisfy his lust on his brother's bride. There followed the Battle of the Centaurs and the Lapithae. Lear, unaware of the magnificent prophecy and fitness of his metaphor, foretells the end of the sisters.

That Shakespeare shifted the sex of the Centaurs may be explained by one of Albany's speeches:

> Proper deformity seems not in the fiend
> So horrid as in woman. (IV.ii.61)

Extreme sensuality, cruelty, and deceit, the essentials of the primitive and uncivilized race, are terrifying enough in men; but women, supposedly the embodiment of all that is beautiful and gentle in the spirit and soul of humanity, are much more appalling when their instincts become deformed.

Immediately upon seeing his daughters as the Centaurs, Lear sees hell and his punishment. Having acknowledged his crime he realizes that he is, like Ixion, undergoing suffering in hell.

> There's hell, there's darkness, there's the
> sulphurous pit; burning, scalding, stench,
> consumption. (IV.v.131)

When he awakens he establishes his identity with Ixion in a direct allusion. Having admitted his sins, he recognizes his sin as Ixion's sin and accepts the inevitability and justness of his punishment:

> You do me wrong to take me out of the grave.
> .....I am bound
> Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
> Do scald like molten lead. (IV.vii.48)

Ixion's wheel does stop for a brief period of time when Orpheus descends into Hades. Orpheus is the Principle of Love and is often identified with the Christ figure. Cordelia represents this same principle of Love in King Lear, and she stops Lear's wheel for a moment. She becomes comparable to the Christ figure as we identify her with the redeeming power of love that sacrifices itself.

> There she shook
> The holy water from her heavenly eyes,
> And clamor moistened. (IV.ii.33)

Lear, believing himself dead, further establishes her divine nature by calling her a "soul in bliss" (IV.vii.46) and "a spirit." (IV.vii.49) Orpheus accomplished his miraculous soothing of the agonies with music, and music is necessary to rescue Lear from his punishment. At the crucial moment in which he is to awaken, music is called for: "Please you draw near. Louder the music there!" (IV.vii.25) As soon as Orpheus left Hades, the punishments began anew, and as Cordelia dies, Lear's suffering is resumed.

The Ixion myth is established in the imagery of the play by Lear's realization that he is being punished on a wheel, his recognition of his daughters as Centaurs, and by the omnipresence of Jupiter as the revenging god whose weapon is the thunderbolt. From this myth Shakespeare took the details and created the imagery in the play from them. He seems actually to have entered Ixion's world and to have lived there, the whole play so pulsates with the breath of mythology.

In the popular mythological accounts in the Renaissance four figures suffer in Hades side by side for crimes committed against the gods. Tityus attempted to assault Latona and was killed by Jove, or according to other

accounts by Apollo, with a thunderbolt. He lies stretched out over nine acres of ground and a vulture or a serpent plucks at his liver, which is renewed periodically.[5] Tantalus for a horrible joke that he played on the gods at a banquet is forced to thirst after a spring of water that flees before him.[6] Sisyphus for betraying Jupiter is sentenced to roll a huge stone up and down a hill forever. And the fourth famous figure is Ixion.

It is likely that Shakespeare would extend his mythical references to include Ixion's famous companions. In the light of this, several images seem to have mythical references in them. The Fool in talking to Kent of Lear's fortune refers to a wheel that rolls up and down a hill. (II.iv.70-75) It is Fortune's wheel, but the idea of its rolling up and down the hill drawing "the great one" after it might well be an extension of the Ixion myth to include Sisyphus. As Lear dies, Kent stops those who would attempt to prolong the life of the old man:

> O let him pass! He hates him
> That would upon the rack of this tough world
> Stretch him out longer. (V.iii.315)

The rack and stretch seem to suggest the myth of Tityus. Not only does Tityus lie stretched out on the ground, but a vulture plucks at his liver. Lear complains to Regan that Goneril

> hath tied
> Sharp-tooth'd unkindness like a vulture, here! (II.iv.137)

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5. Ovid, Metamorphoses, IV. 457.
Hyginus, "Fabularum Liber" in Mythographi Latini, Amsterdam, 1681, adds the thunder and serpents to the myth: "a Jove fulmine est interfectus, qui novem jugeribus ad inferos exporrectus jacere dicitur & serpens ei appositus est..." (chap. IV, p. 162)

6. Ovid, Metamorphoses, VI, 173; IV, 458.

Here is the terrible vulture plucking away at the body of the gigantic figure lying prone on the ground.[7] There would seem to be a reminiscence of this image in a later speech made by Albany in which he mentions humanity preying on itself like monsters of the deep.

The more detailed accounts of the Tityus myth make serpents the instruments of torture. Tityus, for a crime that is remarkably similar to Ixion's crime, is punished by the serpents which are also entwined in Ixion's wheel, lashing and stinging the two sinners with their slimy poisonous bodies. In King Lear there are many serpent images, and every one of them is connected with Regan and Goneril, Lear's torturers. The hissing, striking snakes, writhing over the body of the giant pluck and gnaw at his liver, and they creep and coil over Ixion as he lies bound to the wheel. Lear's daughters become these treacherous, loathsome serpents that spread their venom and evilness. Lear, wild with rage, commands the gods to curse Goneril:

> that she may feel
> How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
> To have a thankless child. (I.iv.311)

He tells Regan that Goneril

> has struck me with her tongue
> Most serpent like, upon the heart. (II.iv.162)

Regan's and Goneril's cruelties

> sting
> His mind so venomously that burning shame
> Detains him from Cordelia. (IV.iv.49)

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7. Ibid., XIII, 32; IV, 460.
This allusion is usually interpreted as referring to Prometheus.

Albany calls Goneril "this gilded serpent" (V.iii.83), and Gloucester sends Lear to Dover rather than see Regan's

> fierce sister
> In his anointed flesh stick boarish fangs. (III.vii.58)

As Lear wanders through the storm enduring extreme torture, he sees "a thousand (fiends) with red burning spits! come hizzing in on 'em." (III.iv.16)

It was a habit of Shakespeare's mind that the serpent images and the Centaur reference should set off a train of images dealing with monsters. The idea of the vile snakes and of the grotesque bodies of the half-human-half-animal calls forth a group of associated images.[8] Regan and Goneril are called "unnatural hags," "pelican daughters," "she-foxes," and "tigers, not daughters." Goneril is a "marble-hearted fiend," "a detested kite," and she has a "wolfish visage."

Not only did Shakespeare extend his myth to include those figures commonly associated with Ixion in Hades, but he also gave to King Lear the tone of the myths. The unmitigated brutality which takes place in the play has no place in the literature of the real. It is only in the myths that we find actions similar to the gouging out of Gloucester's eyes. This is a device comparable to the Philomela-Procne myth of revenge or to the cruelty of Medea's revenge.

Jove's wrath vents itself in terrifying sheets of lightning and ear-blasting torrents of wild thunder. By the thunderbolt Jupiter dispatched Ixion to Hades where he was punished for his intended sex offence against Juno. One of the most important elements in the Lear world is the tremendous magnitude and importance of the storm, the storm that is

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8. Robert Heilman, op. cit., has collected these monster images which actually throw no additional light on the Ixion myth, merely being called forth by the serpent and vulture images.

beyond the power of the human mind to picture it. From the Ixion myth Shakespeare took Jove's thunderbolt, magnified it, and dispatched Lear to hell with it. The storm with its terrible grandeur and fearsomeness is Lear's banishment into suffering and purgatory. Never before had such a storm been witnessed by men:

> Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,
> Such groans of roaring wind and rain, I never
> Remember to have heard. Man's nature cannot carry
> The affliction nor the fear. (III.ii.49)

His puny strength is pitted against the anger of the gods as he battles with the storm. He contends

> with the elements;
> ... tears his white hair
> Which the impetuous blasts, with eyeless rage
> Catch in their fury and make nothing of. (III.i.9)

His screams ring out at the thunder that lashes and strikes at him with relentless fury:

> You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires,
> Vain courtiers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
> Singe my white head! And thou all-shaking thunder,
> Strike flat the thick rotundity o'th'world. (III.ii.7)

Mad with impotent rage he connects his daughters and Jove's punishment:

> Rumble thy bellyfull! Spit, fire! spout, rain!
> ...
> But yet I call you servile ministers
> That will with two pernicious daughters join
> Your high engender'd battles 'gainst a head
> So old and white as this. (III.ii.24)

Completely unaware of where he is or who he is, he imagines himself in Athens and calls Edgar "the Theban" and "my good Athenian." (III.iv.162) He wishes to know the cause of thunder. (III.iv.160) The parallelism of his own story with the Ixion myth has caused him to see himself in ancient Greece where he discusses the early philosophical question of the nature of thunder. Cordelia, ignorant of the identification of Lear with

Ixion, is unable to comprehend the punishment dealt out to her father.

> Was this a face
> To be oppos'd against the deep dread-bolted thunder?
> In the most terrible and nimble stroke
> Of quick cross lightning? (IV.vii.35)

Lear ultimately realizes the futility of resisting the gods and his whole attitude changes. He admits his own insignificance and frailty, no longer fighting his punishment.

> When the rain came to wet me once; when the
> thunder would not place at my bidding; there
> I found'em, there I smelt'em out. (IV.vii.103)

After his complete purgation he humbly acknowledges that man is not god but is subject to the will and wrath of the gods.

Lear always associates vengeance and wrath with thunder. Refusing to admit the existence of sin in his make-up, he builds up a barricade of unreasonable pride in what he believes to be his supernatural self. Until the storm scene when he is so obviously reduced to nothing, he refuses to see his own shortcomings. In this pompous state, he angrily turns on Goneril:

> I do not bid the Thunderbearer shoot thee,
> Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove. (III.ii.231)

He demands that

> All the stor'd vengeance of heaven fall
> On her ungrateful top. (II.iv.165)

The thunder images are extended by the other characters. Ironically Goneril complains that Lear hourly "flashes from one gross crime to another." (I.ii.4) Even Edmund admits that "revenging gods" bend their "thunders against parricides." (II.i.48)

As the thunder and storm represent Lear's banishment into hell, music and love symbolize his emergence from purgatory. It is Cordelia, as has already been stated, who takes Lear from hell with the aid of the

music and the physician. Cordelia is parallel to Chiron, the good Centaur, who is always associated with Aesculapius, the physician. In King Lear we have this association of Cordelia and the doctor. However she is ironically dubbed a physician during the course of the play. As Lear banishes Cordelia and places himself and his kingdom into the hands of his two daughters, Kent, realizing the folly of the old man's act, attempts to move him from his fatal decision:

> Kill thy physician and the fee bestow
> Upon the foul disease. (I.i.167)

During the most excruciating hours of his punishment he begs for relief:

> Let me have a surgeon,
> I am cut to the brains. (IV.vi.195)

The surgeon comes to be Cordelia. As she, with the symbol of love, awakens him, she makes an allusion to healing.

> O my father, restoration hang
> Thy medicine on my lips. (IV.vii.27)

Music and love together heal Lear and signify his emergence from hell. Only once in the play do we hear music, and that is when Lear is freed from purgatory. Thoroughly humble and gloriously seeking forgiveness, triumphant music fills the Lear Universe. In Lear's period of punishment the music is harsh, discordant, and out of tune. Kent, talking to one of Cordelia's gentlemen, describes Lear's disordered mind:

> Well, sir, the poor distress'd Lear's i'th' town;
> Who sometimes in his better tune remembers
> What we are come about. (IV.iv.42)

Lear's mind is a mass of wild, discordant jumbled chords and untuned strings. Cordelia prays to the gods to cure her father's wild state:

> Cure this great breach in his abused nature!
> The untun'd and child jarring senses, O, wind up
> Of this child chang'd father. (IV.vi.17)

Here Lear's mind is actually thought of as a stringed instrument out of tune. With music and love, the great breach is cured, and Lear is delivered from hell.

Before Lear attains humility and, consequently, redemption, he undergoes a period of terrific torture and punishment. In the interval between the storm and his restoration by Cordelia, his soul is purged and stripped bare of all pretense and pride. Up until this time Lear had seen himself as a god-man, dealing out punishment, chastening and ruling human lives as though he were beyond the bounds of humanity. In himself he sees no flaws, nothing that he should feel shame for. Lear is the type of man who refuses to admit even to himself that he is or has been evil or has committed crimes. It is only in his mad ravings that all pretense is ripped from him, leaving the elemental Lear will all the suppressed subconscious feelings manifesting themselves until his secret guilt is revealed, a guilt which he connects in his mind with an earlier sexual depravity. He is obsessed by the idea of sex, raving and screaming in the night with the most coarse and obscene allusions to sex. But it is a Lear who until his punishment has refused to admit to himself his crime.

> Hide thou, thou bloody hands;
> Thou perjur'd and thou similar man of virtue,
> Thou art incestuous. (III.ii.55)

Ironically in a play in which so much stress is placed on illegitimacy as far as Gloucester is concerned, Lear's sexual offenses remains hidden until Lear unconsciously establishes it. Seeing the blind Gloucester, but ignorant of who he is, Lear immediately launches into tirades of sex allusions:

> I pardon that man's life. What was thy cause?
> Adultery?
> Thou shalt not die for it. Die for adultery? No.
> The wren goes to't, and the small gilded fly
> Does lecher in my sight.

> Let copulation thrive; for Gloucester's bastard son
> Was kinder to his father than my daughters
> Got 'tween the lawful sheets.
> To't, luxury, pell-mell! for I lack soldiers,
> Behold yond simpering dame,
> Whose face between her forks presageth snow,
> That minces virtue, and does shake her head
> To hear of pleasure's name.
> The fitchew nor the soiled horse goes to't
> With a more riotous appetite. (IV.vi.57)

He ends the expose with the Centaur image, and immediately recognizes that he, like Ixion, is suffering for carnal indulgences he has kept hidden.

Seeing the cause of his punishment, he sets himself free from the obsession:

> Does thou squiny at me? No, do thy worse,
> blind Cupid! I'll not love. (IV.vi.141)

He has admitted his sin and now he may be absolved and healed. His unreasonable self-pride is gone and his own personal insignificance in the totality of the universe is realized. No longer does he deal out justice to other:

> Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!
> Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back.
> Thou notly lusts to use her in that kind
> To which thou whip'st her. (IV.vi.167)

Lear has refused to wear clothes as he was in the throes of purgatory. Clothing becomes the symbol of the pretense of man, the disguise placed on man's spirit and mind. Like Ixion, who when on the wheel is naked, Lear in hell undergoing punishment for his crimes that are sex-centered strips his clothes from his body as a sign of complete honesty and purgation of soul. Seeing the naked Edgar, he cries:

> Thou art the thing itself: unaccustomed man is
> no more but such a poor, bare, forked creature
> as thou. Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton
> here. (III.iv.114)

Having acknowledged his sin and having been purged, he sleeps and awakens whole in mind and with a complete understanding of himself. He is freshly dressed when he awakens. After he has stripped the secrecy from his inmost thoughts and has suffered his punishment, his body is symbolically clothed anew:

> Is he array'd?
> Ay, madam. In the heaviness of sleep
> We put fresh garments on him. (IV.vii.22)

All the sex images connected with Lear point to the ultimate punishment and repentance of Lear. It is only in moments of ungovernable rage that Lear's subconscious obsession with sex manifests itself. Momentarily insane with anger, he gives utterance to those thoughts that he will otherwise not admit to himself. His subconscious is so absorbed in these repressed ideas that he labels Goneril a "degenerate bastard." (I.iv.275) Again in fury he reveals his hidden obsessive thoughts when, seething over Goneril's conduct, he exclaims:

> If thou shouldst not be glad
> I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb,
> Sepulchring an adultress. (II.iv.134)

And one of Lear's favorite curses is "thy whoreson dog."

Lear's concern with sex is emphasized by the mad chatter of the Fool and Edgar. The air is permeated and supercharged with sensuality. The Fool tells Lear:

> Now a little fire in a wild field were like
> an old lecher's heart--a small spark, all
> the rest on's a body cold. (III.iv.117)

He calls the darkness a "brave night to cool a courtesan." (III.ii.79) His prophecy is that the world will be in a normal condition when "bawds and whores do churches build" (III.iii.90), and he sings, "Leave thy drink and thy whore." (III.iv.137) Edgar prattles:

> Commit not with man's sworn espouse...(III.iv.83)

> A servingman...serv'd the lust of my mistress's heart and did the act of darkness with her: swore as many oaths as I spake words and broke them in the face of heaven; one that slept in the contriving of lust, and wak'd to do it. Wine lov'd I deeply, dice dearly; and in women out paramour'd the Turk. (III.iv.92)

> Keep thy foot out of brothel, thy hand out of placket, thy pen from lender's book, and defy thy foul fiend. (III.iv.99)

The association of the old king with lust is extended until it includes his soldiers.

> And let his knights have colder looks among you. What grows of it, no matter. (I.iii.23)

His soldiers are

> Men so disordered, so debosh'd, and bold
> That his court, infected with their manners,
> Shows like a riotous inn. Epicurism and lust
> Make it more like a tavern and a brothel
> Than a grac'd palace. (I.iv.267)

The thunder and the storm banished Lear to his hell of suffering where he fought and defied the gods until he recognized himself as a creature subject to all human weaknesses and frailties. In his hell he finally admitted his crimes that established him with Ixion on the wheel and his daughters with the Centaurs. And as Orpheus brought relief from suffering with music and love, Cordelia healed Lear with music and love.

However these details were not the only contributions made by the Ixion myth to <u>King Lear</u>. The underlying themes of the myth are the underlying themes of Shakespeare's mighty play: violation of order, justice and retribution, and individual responsibility versus the wanton gods.

The violation of order is of prime importance in both plots. It was Ixion's inspiration to become god that drew down upon his head the wrath of Jove and the eternal agony in Hades. In Lear one of the fatal flaws is the aspiration to be a god. The old king commands and orders his

daughters and his subjects, oblivious to what may be the results of his actions. He believes that his powers extend even to the heavens and that the gods must move at his bidding. Ixion's violation of order resulted in his monster-children, his death, and his agonized suffering; and Lear's crime with the overblown sense of greatness resulted in his tragic torture and death.

> That nature which contemns its origin
> Cannot be bordered certain in itself. (IV.ii.33)

Due justice and retribution are dealt out to Ixion for his ingratitude and his sin against his benefactor. All stealth and secrecy availed him nothing, and he was made to endure eternal suffering. In Lear one of the basic principles is that justice is measured out for crimes and that man is responsible for his actions. For deeds of hate, cruelty and lust ultimately the just retribution is exacted. Lear by his wilful actions incurs his own punishment:

> to wilful men
> The injuries that they themselves procure
> Must be their schoolmasters. (II.iv.307)

Albany warns Goneril that justice is demanded for our acts:

> If that the gods do not their visible spirits
> Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
> It will come,
> Humanity must perforce prey on itself
> Like monsters of the deep. (IV.ii.49)

The full circle of our actions brings the logical justice:

> The gods are just and of our pleasant vices
> Makes instruments to plague us. (V.iii.170)

Two other philosophies run through the play: the wantonness of the gods and the idea of individual responsibility in a godless world. Gloucester for a time and Edgar in a moment of complete dejection see the gods indiscriminately governing "our conditions" and pushing us around like pawns on a chess board. The second philosophy is the materialistic

credo expounded by Edmund. (I.ii.128-143) Pirithous, son of Ixion, defied the power of the gods in the same manner as Edmund does:

> One mocked at their credulity, a scoffer of the gods, one reckless in spirit, Ixion's son, Pirithous..."You concede too much power to the gods, if they can take away the form of things." All the rest were shocked and disapproved such words, and especially Lelex, ripe both in mind and years who replied: "The power of heaven is indeed immeasurable and has no bounds: and whatever the gods decree is done."[9]

In Ovid, in the account of Ixion's son, Shakespeare may have found two of the philosophies in the play.

King Lear is a study of ingratitude, passion, and punishment, the same themes as in the myth of Ixion. Lear's seemingly unexplainable obsession with sex is the subconscious realization of carnal indulgences, a trait of his character that manifests itself in the animal-like passion of his two daughters. Lear, knowing the Ixion myth, recognizes the parallelism of his crime and punishment with those of Ixion. The classic gods have flung their thunderbolts at Lear to blast him from his pride and have chained him to a "wheel of fire" in everlasting torment.

This particular use of myth exemplifies Shakespeare's developing attitude toward the spiritual significance of mythology. He saw in myths man's attempt to explain those profundities of life and death which can have no scientific or rational explanation. In every civilization men have hated and loved and have incurred extreme penalties to become human sacrifices to powers that demand justice. The same essentials of human existence constituted life in the Hellenic era and in Renaissance England. By the use of mythology Shakespeare bridged the gap between the two worlds.

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9. Ovid, Metamorphoses, VIII, 611ff.

Chapter IV

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

> In Antony and Cleopatra tragedy is merging into mysticism and what is left must be said in terms of myth and miracle.[1]

A myth of transforming love, parallel in plot with the story of Antony and Cleopatra, suffuses the imagery of a play often regarded as a tragedy of a man who gave up honor for a strumpet. Shakespeare in creating Antony and Cleopatra (for truly they are as much his creations as are Hamlet and Lady Macbeth) gave to the bewitching Egyptian queen and the mighty Roman warrior the characteristics of their archetypes, Venus and Mars, and placed them in a world suited only for gods:

> The Roman world is revivified at its climacteric grandeur and is shown as something so boundless that the princes which sway its destiny are comparable only to heroes of myths or divine beings.[2]

Donald Stauffer in his study states that,

> Hercules, his (Antony's) forebear and Mars are associated with him until the trinity moves as one, while his ancestor Bacchus is easily disregarded.[3]

In this connection interestingly enough Shakespeare omits from those passages in North's translation of Plutarch's Lives, from which he so closely borrowed, any references to the god Bacchus. He did, on the other

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1. G. Wilson Knight, Myth and Miracle, London: Methuen, 1948, p. 13.

2. G. Wilson Knight, The Imperial Theme, London: Oxford University Press, p. 199.

3. Donald Stauffer, Shakespeare's World of Images, New York: W. W. Norton, 1949, p. 239.

hand, actually increase the number of references to Hercules and Mars.

The first failure to follow the source is in regard to Antony's ancestry. In Plutarch

> Antony came of the race of Hercules...and in the manner of his life he followed Bacchus, and therefore he was called the new Bacchus.[4]

The second distinct omission of Bacchus occurs in the famous passage in Act Two, Scene Three when Enobarbus describes the Eqyptian queen as Antony first saw her. Shakespeare quotes almost verbatim from Plutarch, describing Cleopatra as apparelled like Venus, fanned by mermaids and Nereids, and describing the marketplace where Antony sat alone as the people flocked to see the enchantress. However, here Shakespeare leaves Plutarch:

> And there went a rumor in the people's mouths, that the goddess Venus was come to play with the god Bacchus, for the general good of all Asia.[5]

It seems a justified inference that Shakespeare omitted these passages from Plutarch because he did not want his audience to conceive of Antony as Bacchus.

Open references to Antony as Mars, Hercules, and Jove are made many times during the play.[6] The Mars similes applied to Antony are

> those his goodly eyes,
> That o'er the files and musters of the war
> Have glowed like plated Mars; (I.i.4)

Enobarbus tells Lepidus to

> Let Antony look over Caesar's head,
> And speak as loud as Mars; (II.ii.7)

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4. Plutarch, Shakespeare's Plutarch, Shakespeare Classics, New York: Duffield and Co., 1909, II, 96, 97.

5. Ibid., p. 36.

6. Cf. Knight, The Imperial Theme, pp. 244-249; Stauffer, op. cit., pp. 233-242.

Cleopatra, bitter at Antony's treatment of her, declares

> Though he be painted one way like a Gorgon,
> The other way's a Mars. (II.v.117)

Plutarch makes Antony the descendant of Hercules.[7] Shakespeare also in several cases reminds us that Antony is kin to the strong Greek. Cleopatra calls Antony her "Herculean Roman." (I.iii.84) When she deserts Antony at the Battle of Actium and he unexplainably flees, he later says,

> The shirt of Nessus is upon me: teach me,
> Alcides, thou mine ancestor, thy rage.
> Let me lodge Lichas on the horns o' the moon,
> And with those hands that grasped the heaviest club
> Subdue my worthiest self. (IV.xii.47)

Before Antony's final defeat prophetic music is heard:

> 1. Sold. Music i'th' air.
> 3. Sold. Under the earth.
> 4. Sold. It signs well, does it not?
> 3. Sold. No.
> 4. Sold. Peace, I say!
> What should this mean?
> 2. Sold. 'Tis the god Hercules, whom Antony loved,
> Now leaves him. (IV.iii.17)[8]

Another time, a soldier describing Antony's miraculous power as a warrior swears "By Hercules." (III.vii.68)

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7. Plutarch, op. cit., p. 6:
"Now it had been a speech in old time, that the family of Antonii were descended from one Anton, the son of Hercules whereof the family took name. This opinion did Antonius seek to confirm in all his doings not only resembling him in the likeness of his body, as we have said, but also in the wearing of his garments."

8. Plutarch, op. cit., pp. 119-120:
"Furthermore, the selfsame night, within a little of midnight, when all the city was quiet, full of fear and sorrow, thinking what would be the issue and end of this war: it is said that suddenly they heard a marvelous sweet harmony of sundry sorts of instruments of music, with the cry of a multitude of people, as they had been dancing, and had sung as they used in Bacchus' feasts, with movings and turnings after the manner of the satyrs: and it seemed that all this dance went through the city unto the gate that opened to the enemies, and that all the troupe that made this noise they heard, went out of the city at that gate. Now such as in reason sought the depth of the interpretation of this wonder, thought that it was the god unto whom Antonius bore a singular devotion to counterfeit and resemble him that did forsake them."

The third group of divine appellations are those of Jove. Agrippa refers to Antony as the "god of Jupiter" (III.ii.10); Octavia calls him the "Jove of power" (III.iv.29); and Antony after Enobarbus's desertion "continues still a Jove." (IV.vi.29) There are also many passages which refer to Antony as a god. He is the "demi-Atlas of this earth." (I.v.23) He is described in the proportions of a god:

> His face was as the heav'ns, and therein stuck
> A sun and moon, which kept their course and lighted
> The little O, the earth...
>
> His legs bestrid the ocean; his rear'd arm
> Crested the world. His voice was propertied
> As all the tuned sphere, and that to friends;
> But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
> He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,
> There was no winter in't; an autumn 'twas
> That grew the more by reaping. His delights
> Were dolphin-like: they show'd his back above
> The element they lived in. In his livery
> Walk'd crowns and crownets. Realms and islands were
> As plates dropped from his pocket. (V.ii.92)

Another time:

> he hath fought today
> As if a god in hate of mankind had
> Destroyed in such a shape. (IV.viii,26)

Cleopatra is also given divine similes. From Plutarch Shakespeare took three references of deities:

> She did lie
> In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold tissue,
> Over-picturing that Venus where we see
> The fancy outwork nature. (II.ii.201)[9]

Her attendants are boys like "smiling Cupids." (II.ii.203) She is described as the moon goddess of Egypt:

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9. Plutarch, op. cit., pp. 38, 39:
"And now for the person of herself: she was laid under a pavilion of cloth of gold of tissue, apparelled and attired like the goddess Venus, commonly drawn in the picture: and hard by her, on either hand of her, pretty fair boys apparelled as painters do set forth god Cupid..."

She
In the habiliments of the goddess Isis
That day appear'd. (III.vi.18)[10]

Antony calls her "My Thetis." (III.vii.60) She thinks of herself as god-like but of a lesser degree than Juno:

Had I great Juno's strength
The strong-winged Mercury would fetch thee up
And set thee by Jove's side. (IV.xv.36)

She is able to make "a shower of rain as well as Jove." (I.ii.151) Venus is used by metonymy for love. In the opening lines of the play, Antony turns to Cleopatra, saying,

Now for the love of Love, and her soft hours. (I.i.44)

Throughout the entire play there are these direct applications of mythic names and similes to Antony and Cleopatra. However, there is a more pervasive aura of mythology running through the imagery of the play, identifications of Mars and Venus that are hidden and must be probed for among the ambiguities of the imagery. Because the images do have these mythical levels of interpretation the play becomes more mystic and transcendent. Antony and Cleopatra play two roles, one in the story of the Roman and the Egyptian and the other in the love myth of Venus and Mars. Here Shakespeare's genius was rapidly approaching its absolute fruition.

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10. This comparison of Venus with Isis is in Plutarch.
An interesting comment on Isis is made by Robert Graves, The White Goddess, London, 1948, pp. 66-67. Venus, according to Graves, is one of the forms given to the White Goddess, the deity of love, of complete femininity, the original of every goddess worshipped in all ancient cultures. Isis as worshipped in Egypt was therefore a form of the White Goddess. Venus and Isis, as well as Minerva, Diana, Juno, and others, were all basically this same goddess.
From Apuleius's Golden Ass: "I am she that is the natural mother of all things, mistress and governess of all elements, initial progeny of worlds, chief of the powers divine, queen of all that are in Hell, principal of them that are in Heaven, manifested alone and under one form of all gods and goddesses. The Egyptians call me by my true name, Isis."

He so skillfully wove the myth of the Roman deities into the imagery of the play that it has only recently been unraveled.

Shakespeare probably took the myth of the love affair of Venus and Mars from the fourth book of Ovid, adding details from Boccaccio and Comes:

> Even the Sun, who with his central light guides
> all the stars, has felt the power of love.
> The Sun's love we will relate. This god was
> first to see the shame of Venus and Mars; this
> god sees all things first. Shocked at the sight
> he revealed her sin to the goddess's husband,
> Vulcan, Juno's son, and where it was committed.
> Then Vulcan's mind reeled and the work upon which
> he was engaged fell from his hands. Straightway
> he fashioned a net of fine links of bronze, so
> thin that they would escape detection of the
> eye. Not the finest threads of wool would
> surpass that work; no, not the web which the
> spider lets down from the ceiling beam.
> He made the web in such a way yield to the
> slightest touch, the least movement, and
> then he spread it deftly over the couch.
> Now then the goddess and her paramour had come
> thither, by the husband's art and by the net
> so cunningly prepared, they were both caught
> and held fast in each other's arms. Straight-
> way Vulcan, the Lemnian, opened wide the
> ivory door and invited in the other gods. There
> lay the two in chains, disgracefully, and some
> one of the merry gods prayed that he might be
> so disgraced. The gods laughed, and for a
> long time this story was the talk of heaven.[11]

Not only the myth but also the symbols and characteristics of Venus and Mars are infused in the imagery of the play. Mars, son of Jove and Juno, was the god of war. He fell under the spell of Venus

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11. Ovid, Metamorphoses, IV, 170-190.

and was the father of Cupid by her, according to some accounts.[12] As the god of war his symbols were the horse, the wolf, and the dog.[13] Venus, in Roman and Greek mythology, is the power of nature, living and working in the three elements of air, earth, and fire and springing from the sea.[14] Her powers are twofold, of love and of the sea. As the Roman goddess, Venus, she is generally regarded as reigning over sensual love; but as the Greek deity, Aphrodite, she is looked upon as goddess of higher and purer lover, of wedded love and fruitfulness. In her beauty and grace she outshines all other goddesses, embodying all traits of womanliness and femininity. Her powers as goddess of the sea include the command of the shifting gale and changeful sky, command of the sea and maritime traffic, and authority over storms and lightning. Because she was regarded as the creative vivifying force of Nature, she is the goddess of gardens and groves and spring and all its bounties. Her various symbols are the myrtle, rose, apple, swan, mussel, dolphin, and tortoise; and her animals are the he-goat, the hare,

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12. Boccaccio, Della Geneologia, Book 9, pp. 148, 149.
Perhaps as an outgrowth of this association with Venus, his name came to be synonymous with fertility. He was originally one of the mightiest gods of nature, affording fertility and protection to fields and herds and reigning over the fertility of spring. In this connection a horse was yearly sacrificed to him to insure the fair growth of seeds. Bacchus and Ceres were later substituted for Mars in the spring, and his celebration was held in the autumn. Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities, pp. 119, 120.

13. Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities, pp. 119, 120.

14. Ovid, Metamorphoses, IV, 537-540:
"Some favor is due me from the sea, if in its sacred depths my being sprang once from its foam, and in the Greek tongue I have a name from this."

the dove, and the sparrow.[15]

Both Venus and Mars represent great degrees of fertility and live-giving power, Venus being the goddess of spring and Mars the god of agriculture. In relation to this characteristic, this play abounds in fertility images, especially in food-fertility associations. Perhaps Shakespeare carried out in every context the many traits of the mythical deities. Cleopatra refers to her past amours:

> My salad days,
> When I was green in judgement, cold in blood. (I.v.74)

Food is associated with Antony's first meeting of her:

> Upon her landing, Antony sent to her,
> Invited her to supper. She replied,
> It would be better he became her guest;
> Which she entreated. Our courteous Antony,
> Whom ne'er the word 'no' women heard speak,
> Being barber'd ten times o'er, goes to the feast,
> And for his ordinary pays his heart
> For what his eyes eat only. (II.ii.231)

Enobarbus describes her paradoxical charms in terms of food:

> Other women cloy
> The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
> Where most she satisfies; for vilest things
> Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
> Bless her when she is riggish. (II.ii.245)

"Riggish" according to Kittredge means wanton, but a second meaning of it has nautical significance. The combination of sea and fertility images strongly suggests the presence of Venus. Cleopatra calls music "moody food of us that trade in love." (II.v.1) News of Antony is "fruitful tidings in mine ears, That long time have been barren." (II.v.25) Pompey calls Cleopatra Antony's "fine Egyptian cookery" (II.vi.64); and Antony will go "to his Egyptian dish again." (II.vi.132) Enobarbus asks Antony,

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15. Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities, pp. 96, 1643.

Shall we dance the Egyptian Bacchanals
And celebrate our drink? (II.vii.109)

Antony and Cleopatra will have one more night together, "fill our bowls once more." (III.xiii.184). He will force

The wine peep through the scars. Come on, my queen,
There's sap in't yet. (III.xiii.192)

Antony with a sense of foreboding realizes his final battle with Caesar may be fatal, but gaily he says,

Let's to supper, come
And drown consideration. (IV.ii.44)

Cleopatra will "eat no meat; I'll not drink, sir" (V.ii.49) after Antony is dead. Enobarbus calls Antony "thou mine of Bounty." (IV.vii.32) Cleopatra says of her lover,

For his bounty,
There was no winter in't, an autumn 'twas
That grew the more by reaping. (V.ii.88)

The celebration to honor Mars as the god of agriculture was held in autumn. This linking of autumn and bounty seems significant.

The serpent is an ancient symbol of fertility, and serpent images abound in the play. Serpents, probably because of this idea of fertility, have throughout history been used as a sex symbol. Cleopatra is known to have been a member of an ancient love cult. Also serpents are associated with Hercules and Mars, Hercules sometimes being symbolized by a serpent and Mars having a sacred serpent.[16] Finally, if Venus is one form of the White Goddess, she is represented as a serpent, the White Goddess taking the form of the fish, the serpent, the swan, and other animals.[17] For these five different reasons the serpents seem to be linked either directly

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16. Ovid, Metamorphoses, III, 32ff.

17. Graves, op. cit., p. 340.

or indirectly with Venus, Mars, and Hercules. Cleopatra is Antony's "serpent of old Nile." (I.v.25) Here fertility, the sacred serpent of Mars, and the identification of Venus with the serpent may be in Shakespeare's mind. In anger Cleopatra would

> Melt Egypt into Nile! and kindly creatures
> Turn all to serpents! (II.v.79)

This idea of being changed into serpents fits the disguise of the White Goddess as a serpent. Lepidus tells Antony,

> Your serpent of Egypt is bred now of your
> mud by the operation of the sun. (II.vii.31)

While this is explained by the Renaissance theory of natural science, the association of serpent with fertility and fertility with Cleopatra and the mythical deities further establishes the myth in the imagery. When the messenger comes to tell Cleopatra of Antony's marriage to Octavia, he "shoulds't come like a Fury crown'd with snakes." (II.v.40) Again she thinks of Antony

> Though he be painted one way like a Gorgon
> The other way's a Mars. (II.v.117)

Twice the association is made with the Medusa, and both times Antony is in mind. Viewed in the light of Cleopatra's membership in the love cult and the association of Venus with the serpent, the death of Cleopatra by the sting of the asp fits into the general Mars-Venus theme. The asp is "the pretty worm of Nilus." (V.ii.244) The clown wishes Cleopatra "all the joy of the worm." (V.ii.26) The asp's sting is described in terms of love:

> The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch,
> Which hurts and is desir'd. (V.ii.298)

All gentleness is in her voice as she sees the serpent at her breast:

> Dost thou not see the baby at my breast,
> That sucks the nurse asleep? (V.ii.313)

Not only are there these general fertility images which strengthen the belief in the Venus-Mars myth but there are more direct images. As we have already seen, Mars was overcome with love for Venus, forgetting his functions as the deity of war. Venus, becoming enamored of him, became unfaithful to her husband, Vulcan, and mistress of Mars. Vulcan learning of the affair captured them in a net of fine bronze and put them on display for the amusement of the gods. Throughout all mythology Mars follows Venus and fights for her. Several images are directly reminiscent of this myth as it appears in Ovid and Boccaccio. The first of them while not spoken by either Antony or Cleopatra is inspired by them. Cleopatra, passionately lamenting the absence of her lover chides the eunuch for his impotency, vividly remembering the complete masculinity and fertility of her lover. Mardian retorts in the openly sensual conversation:

> Yet I have fierce affections and remember
> What Venus did with Mars. (I.v.18)

A second image deriving its immediate source from this myth occurs after Antony has lost the battle of Actium and Caesar has sent his messenger to Cleopatra. Antony angrily scolds Cleopatra:

> the wise gods seel our eyes,
> In our own filth drop our clear judgements, make us
> Adore our errors, laugh at's while we strut
> To our confusion. (III.xiii.115)

The whole image suggests the presence of the myth. "Seel our eyes," "filth," "drop," "laugh at's," and "confusion" all seem to have a direct source in the myth. Again Cleopatra says to Antony,

> Lord of Lords
> O, infinite virtue, com'st thou smiling from
> The world's great snare uncaught? (IV.viii.19)

This follows an image referring to the Venus-Mars myth. The "snare," "uncaught," and "Lord of Lords" seem to echo the story told by Ovid.

Antony is the "greatest soldier in the world" (I.iii.38) as long as he fights on the land. There is never any question of Antony's success on the battlefield since Mars is the god of the battlefield. The first mention of this comes when Antony talks with Caesar about the approaching battle;

> Antony..... At land thou know'st
> How much we do o'ercount thee.
> Pompey. At land indeed
> Thou dost o'ercount me of my father's house! (II.vi.27)

While this is a pun on the word o'ercount, Antony's supremacy by land is undisputed. Enobarbus and Menas later discuss the relative merits of their generals;

> Eno. You have done well by water.
> Menas. And you by land.
> Eno. You have been a great thief by sea.
> Menas. And you by land. (II.vi.97)

As Antony prepares to fight Caesar on the sea, Enobarbus and the other soldiers beg him not to do so:

> Your ships are not well mann'd
> Your mariners are muleters, reapers, people
> Ingrossed by swift impress. In Caesar's fleet
> Their ships are yare; yours, heavy. No disgrace
> Shall fall you for refusing him at sea;
> Being prepar'd for land.
>
> Ant. By sea, by sea!
> Eno. Most worthy sir, you therein throw away
> The absolute soldiership you have by land;
> Distract your army, which doth most consist
> Of war-mark'd footmen; leave executed
> Your own renowned knowledge.
> Ant. But if we fail,
> We then can do't at land. (III.vii.45)

Again:

> Soldier. O noble Emperor, do not fight by sea!
> Trust not to rotten planks. Do you misdoubt
> This sword and these my wounds?
> We
> Have us'd to conquer standing on the earth
> And fighting foot to foot. (III.vii.67)

This emphasis on Antony as a master warrior on the land is explained if we accept him as Mars. Not only was Mars god of war, but he was also god of the fields. All Romans, especially the farmers were expected to fight for their country, perhaps suggesting the "muleters" and "reapers." The "muleters" could also refer to the horse, symbol of Mars.

Antony is a total failure when he fights on the sea as we might expect, for the sea is not his element. After he flees behind the deserting Cleopatra, he realizes his folly:

> Hark the land bids me tread no more upon't!
> It is ashamed to bear me. (III.xi.2)

When Antony's forces engage in battle with Caesar on land, the battle is quickly and easily won by his forces. Mars, god of battle, has returned to his own element and knows no defeat.

> Soldier. The gods make this a happy day to Antony!
> Ant. Would thou and those thy scars had once prevail'd
> To make me fight at land. (IV.v.2)

Later:

> Ant. Their preparation is today by sea;
> We please them not by land. (IV.x.2)

Cleopatra on the other hand belongs to the sea since Venus sprang from the sea. Venus-Cleopatra urges Mars-Antony to fight on the sea, insuring his success. All others try to dissuade him, Cleopatra alone upholding his decision to fight by sea. Antony calls her "my Thetis," that is, my goddess of the waters. A soldier pleads with Antony to "let the Egyptians and the Phoenicians go a ducking." (III.vii.62) Antony, after he has resigned his claim to honor, following love, "claps on his sea-wings." (III.x.20) Cleopatra's sudden desertion from the Battle of Actium has puzzled people for centuries. One explanation of her behavior may lie in the fact that Venus is the goddess of the shifting gale. As

the gale shifts suddenly and unexplainably, Shakespeare may feel that Cleopatra's action must be accepted as one of the traits of the goddess. The power of Venus over winds and gales seems to be present in a comment made by Enobarbus:

> Her passions are made of nothing but the finest
> part of pure love. We cannot call her winds
> and waters sighs and tears. They are greater
> storms and tempests than almanacs can report. (I.ii.157)

Antony is Cleopatra's complete slave on the sea:

> Egypt, thou knew'st too well
> My heart was to thy rudder tied by th' strings,
> And thou shouldst tow me after. (III.xii.58)

Caesar's ambassador links Cleopatra and Venus:

> I was as late as petty to his ends
> As is the morn-dew on the myrtle-leaf
> To his grand sea. (III.xii.9)

Antony's "grand sea" is Cleopatra or Venus. One of the symbols of Venus is the myrtle. Venus maintained mastery over Mars in mythology, and here Antony is ruled by Cleopatra. This use of myrtle and sea with the idea of mastery interestingly unites three of the characteristics of Venus. Antony, believing Cleopatra dead, alludes to the sea in commenting on his lost honor:

> Since Cleopatra died
> I have lived in such dishonour that the gods
> Detest my baseness. I, that with my sword
> Quartered the world, and o'er green Neptune's back
> With ships made cities, condemn myself to lack
> The courage of a woman. (IV.xiv.60)

Other images which seem to be based on Venus's origin in the sea are

> When she first met Mark Antony, she
> pursed up his heart, upon the river Cydnus; (II.ii.188)

and

> Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides,
> So many mermaids, tended her i' th' eyes,

And made their bends adornings. At the helm
A seeming mermaid steers. (II.ii.209)[18]

As Cleopatra prepares to die, she calls for her queenly robes. She is "again for Cydnus to meet Mark Antony." (V.ii.228) She will return to water to meet her lover. In Cleopatra's dream of Antony

His delights
Were dolphin-like. (V.ii.89)

One of the animals associated with Venus as a deity of the sea is the dolphin.

Two images in the play cast Antony as a fish and as a fisherman. The first occurs in Caesar's description of Antony's behavior in Egypt:

he fishes, drinks, and wastes
The lamps of night in revel. (I.iv.5)

It is immediately evident that this means just what the words say, Antony fishes (because Plutarch says so) and has a riotous and gay time at night. But when we learn from Ovid that Venus once changed herself into a fish and hid in the Nile, the passage comes to have more importance.[19] The

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18. While this description of Cleopatra is taken directly from Plutarch, it is interesting that Shakespeare takes only those passages from Plutarch which fit his theme. In the main a comparison of the imagery of the play and Plutarch's account is striking for the dissimilarity of imagery.

19. Ovid, Metamorphoses, V. 322, 333:
"...Typhoeus, sprung up from the lowest depths of earth, inspired the heavenly gods with fire, and how they all turned their backs and fled, until, weary, they found refuge in the land of Egypt and the seven-mouthed Nile...the gods hid themselves in lying shapes: Jove thus became a ram...; Apollo hid in the crow's shape, Bacchus in a goat; the sister of Phoebus in a cat, Juno in a snow-white cow, Venus in a fish, Mercury in an ibis bird."

fish has also been a symbol of fertility for ages, giving the image a third level of meaning. Both Mars and Venus are deities of fertility. The second image makes Antony both a fish and a fisherman:[20]

> Cleopatra. Give me mine angle! We'll to the river.
> There,
> My music playing far off, I will betray
> Tawny-finn'd fishes. My bended hook shall pierce
> Their slimy jaws; and as I draw them up,
> I'll think them everyone an Antony,
> And say, "Ah, ha! y' are caught!"
>
> Char. 'Twas merry when
> You wager'd on your angling, when your diver
> Did hang a salt-fish on his hook, which he
> With fervency drew up. (II.v.18)

Here the fish seems more suggestive of fertility. Note that Cleopatra describes the fish--which she considers Antony--as "tawny-finn'd." Tawny is the same adjective used in the opening lines of the play when the identity is shifted from Antony to Mars.

> Those his goodly eyes
> Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn,
> The office and devotion of their view
> Upon a tawny front. (I.i.5)

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20. Plutarch, op. cit., pp. 44, 45:
"On a time he went to angle for fish, and when he could take none, he was as angry as could be, because Cleopatra stood by. Wherefore he secretly commanded the fishermen, that when he cast in his line, they should straight dive under the water, and put a fish on his hook which they had taken up before: and so snatched up his angling rod, and brought up fish twice or thrice. Cleopatra found it straight, yet she seemed not to see it, but wondered at his excellent fishing; but when she was alone by herself among her own people, she told them how it was, and bade them the next morning to be on the water to see the fishing. A number of people came to the haven, and got into the fisherboats to see the fishing. Antonius then threw in his line, and Cleopatra straight commanded one of her men to dive under water before Antonius' men and to put some old salt-fish upon his bait, like unto those that are brought out of the country of Pont. When he had hung the fish on his hook, Antonius thinking he had taken a fish indeed, snatched up his line presently. Then they all fell a-laughing, Cleopatra laughing also, said unto him: 'Leave us, (my Lord) Egyptians (which dwell in the country of Pharus and Canobus) your angling rod: this is not your profession: thou must hunt after conquering of realms and countries.'"

Closely related to the fish images are the Nile-fertility images. Antony tells Cleopatra,

> By the fire
> That quickens Nilus' slime, I go from hence
> Thy soldier, servant, making war or peace
> As thou affect'st. (I.iii.71)

One of the elements in which Venus lives and moves is fire, and she is the fertilizing goddess of spring. Mars is her servant, usually fighting where she commands. Antony's linking of fire, the creator of life in the mud of the Nile, with his obedience suggests the presence of the mythological deities. Thinking how she will be treated in Rome, Cleopatra cries,

> Rather a ditch in Egypt
> Be gentle grave unto me! rather on Nilus' mud
> Lay me stark nak'd, and let the waterflies
> Blow me into adhorring. (V.ii.60)

The overflowing of the Nile and its receding, leaving behind dead fish and other animal life in the mud, and the fact that Venus once hid herself as a fish in the Nile may possibly suggest her presence in this image.

An important symbol for Mars is the horse, both as the god of war and as the god of agriculture. Some two or three images in the play take on several levels of meaning when the horse and Mars are connected. The first of these comes when Cleopatra and Enobarbus are discussing the approaching Battle of Actium. Cleopatra wanting to command her ships, sees no reason why she should not; but Enobarbus tries to reason her out of following Antony:

> If we should serve with horse and mares together,
> The horse were merely lost; the mares would bear
> A soldier and his horse. (III.vii.8)

The association is made in an openly sensual context, further suggesting

the Venus-Mars myth.[21] Later Antony says to Cleopatra,

> O thou day o' th' world,
> Chain mine armed neck; leap thou, attire and all,
> Through proof of harness to my heart, and there
> Ride on the pants triumphing. (IV.viii.16)

Venus as beauty, fire, and air is the "day o' th' world." That Antony is thinking of himself in a horse-Mars relation is shown bythe words "leap," "harness," "ride," and "pants." The sensual meaning also seems to connect it with their myth of love, "chain," "armed neck," "heart," and "pants." The final horse image occurs in Antony's conversation with Enobarbus:

> That which is now a horse, even with a thought
> The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
> As water is in water. (IV.xiv.11)

With this idea of mutability and of the transient nature of clouds and water, the symbolic quality of horse and water becomes even more important. Remembering the origin of Venus and the sacred animal of Mars, one interpretation of the image is that Mars symbolized by the horse is easily transmuted into being with Venus symbolized by water, the two becoming one as happens in their myth of love.

Venus is composed of fire, air and water and is a power in earth. Mars's dominion is on the land. As Antony prepares for the final battle the four elements are united:

> Antony. Their preparation is today by sea,
> We please them not by land.
> Scarus. For both, my lord.
> Antony. I would they'ld fight i' th' fire or i' th' air;
> We'ld fight there too. (IV.x.3)

Here in a sense is a union of all the elements governed by Mars and Venus. It is a metaphysical union as well as the physical union of the myth.

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21. There may be a punning on the words "Mars" and "mares."

Cleopatra, dying, joyously proclaims,

> I am fire and air; my other elements
> I give to baser life. (V.ii.293)

Venus in her higher form was goddess of fire and air or goddess of pure love. Earth and sea were associated with her as a goddess of sensual love. In Cleopatra's death she attained her highest form, and in death she and Antony are married.

Antony and Cleopatra is a myth of Love and War, the imagery all being related to these two main themes.[22] Although the play may be viewed in one sense as tragedy, Shakespeare has arrayed it with a radiance that transcends any suffering or moral judgement which might be placed on the lovers by the world. In death Antony and Cleopatra are reunited, gladly renouncing the world for love. All through the play

> power and love fight for dominance. Octavius is pure empire, Cleopatra "the finest part of pure love," and in neither is there a tragic conflict. The struggle that shakes the world is merely the outward result of the interior conflict in Antony's mind. Power establishes its empire in the Roman world, while love sets up its triumphant kingdom in the hearts of the two lovers.[23]

Antony gives up honor as the world sees it for Cleopatra, for Love.

So too in the myth of Venus and Mars there is a struggle. Mars is War and Venus is Love. Their love symbolizes far more than an illicit affair at which the gods may laugh. Love caused War to forget his brutality, his ruthlessness, his deceit, his hatred, and his strife.

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22. Knight, Imperial Theme, p. 211.

23. Stauffer, op. cit., p. 233.

Rather he turned to beauty, to gentleness, to all those emotions and yearnings in man's soul which stand opposed to war. Love transcends all, and War forgets himself as she rules sublime forever, her glory captivating all who would draw near her.

* * * *

While this study has dealt primarily with two plays, King Lear and Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare probably used classic myths as thematic images in other plays, especially in the tragedies of this period. An investigation of these plays would most likely reveal additional myths used by him.

This study has shown once more that although four hundred years have passed since Shakespeare wrote his magnificent dramas, four centuries in which thousands of studies of him have been made as men have tried to fathom the complexity of his works, always a new harvest presents itself if only men will gather it:

> Others abide our question. Thou art free
> We ask and ask. Thou smilest, and art still
> Out-topping knowledge.

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Approved by

Director

Examining Committee

William R. Mueller

Richard Bardolph

Hilda T. Harpster

Farrell LaPlante Spivey,
Chairman.